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"The Gold of that Land is good."

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### PRESCOTT.

The annexed sketch of the life of the distinguished American writer after whom our capital is named, is from Appleton's "New American Cyclopaedia," and should have been given in our columns at an earlier day. No one will read it without feeling proud that a name so pure, so eminent in literature, and so worthily and prominently identified with the history of Spanish America, is to be perpetuated in this land of traditional power and glory. It would be difficult to find an appellation more appropriate, in connection with the home of the Aztec and Toltec, or one better entitled to grateful remembrance by the American people:

William Hickling Prescott, L. L. D., an American historian, son of William Prescott, L. L. D., an American lawyer, who died in 1844, was born in Salem, Mass., May 4, 1796, and died in Boston, January 28, 1859. His mother, who died in 1832, was daughter to Thomas Hickling, for many years U. S. Consul at the Azores, and was eminently distinguished for benevolence and active charity. At the age of 12 young Prescott removed with his family to Boston, where he was placed in the academy of Dr. Gardiner, a pupil of Dr. Parr. He entered Harvard College in 1811 and was graduated in 1814. In the last year of his student life, while in the college dining hall, a class-mate playfully threw at him a crust of bread, which struck one of his eyes, inflicting an injury which deprived the eye of sight, except so much as sufficed to distinguish light from darkness. Excessive use of the other eye for purposes of study brought on a rheumatic inflammation, which deprived him entirely of sight for some weeks, and left the eye in too irritable a state to be employed in reading for several years. Subsequently for some years he was unable to use it for many hours of the day, but eventually it became so weak that during the latter half of his life Mr. Prescott could only read for a few moments at a time, and could scarcely see to write at all. Soon after leaving college he crossed the Atlantic for the benefit of his eyes, and consulted the most celebrated oculists of London and Paris, who however could give him no effectual relief. He travelled extensively in England, France and Italy, and resided several months at Rome and Naples. On his return to Boston after two years absence he married and settled for life in his father's family. He had begun the study of the law, but relinquished it in consequence of the state of his eyesight, and resolved to devote himself to literature as a profession, in which he could regulate his own hours in reference to what his sight might enable him to accomplish. He had early conceived a passion for historical writing, and in 1819 determined to devote the next ten years to the study of ancient and modern literatures, and to give the succeeding ten to the composition of a history. He accordingly applied himself to the study of French and Italian literature, and at one time meditated writing a life of Moliere, for which he made an extensive collection of materials. This project he reluctantly abandoned because of the great amount of reading which they involved. Of his studies in this direction the chief fruits were given to the public in a series of essays in the "North American Review," on "Moliere," "Italian Narrative Poetry," and "Poetry and Romance of the Italians," which with others on kindred topics, were printed in a volume of "Miscellaneous," (London and Boston, 1845) of which several editions have since been published. About 1825 Mr. Prescott began to study Spanish literature and history, and after much deliberation selected as the subject of his first work the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. He made at great expense a collection of materials, and before beginning to write was able with his friends in Europe to secure, as he says in the preface to the history, "whatever can materially conduce to

the illustration of the period in question, whether in the form of chronicle, memoir, private correspondence, legal codes, or official documents." Among these were various contemporary manuscripts, covering the whole ground of the narrative, none of which had been printed, and some of them but little known to Spanish scholars. But when his materials were collected, his eyes, which for a time had been well enough to enable him to read a few hours each day, became worse than ever. He obtained the assistance of a reader, who however knew no language but English. "I taught him to pronounce the Castilian in a manner suited, I suspect, much more to my ear than to that of a Spaniard, and we began our wearisome journey through Mariana's noble history. I cannot even now call to mind without a smile the tedious hours in which, seated under some old trees in my country residence, we pursued our slow and melancholy way over pages which afforded no glimmering of light to him, and from which the light came dimly struggling to me through a half intelligible vocabulary. But in a few weeks the light became stronger, and I was cheered by the consciousness of my own improvement; and when we had toiled our way through seven quartos I found I could understand the book when read about two-thirds as fast as ordinary English." At a later period Mr. Prescott obtained the services of a reader acquainted with Spanish and other languages of continental Europe, and could with this aid prosecute his studies with some degree of facility. After more than ten years of labor the "History of Ferdinand and Isabella" was ready for press. A few copies were privately printed and shown to Mr. Sparks, Mr. Ticknor, and other friends, whose cordial approbation at length encouraged the diffident author to publish the work. It appeared in Boston and London toward the end of 1837, in 3 vols., 8vo., and was immediately received with great favor with the public. Don Pascual de Gayangos, the eminent Spanish scholar, reviewed it in the "Edinburgh Review," and pronounced it "one of the most successful historical productions of our time." Mr. Richard Ford, who was better versed in Spanish literature than any other Englishman of his day, praised it highly in the "Quarterly Review," as a work "that need not fear comparison with any that has issued from the European press since this century began." The work was soon translated into German, French and Spanish, and the royal academy of history at Madrid elected the author a corresponding member. Six years were next devoted to the "History of the Conquest of Mexico," (3 vols., 8vo., London and New York, 1843) and four years to the "Conquest of Peru," (2 vols., 8vo., London and New York, 1847). These works were received with the highest favor in all parts of the civilized world, and praises and honors were showered upon the author. He was elected a member of nearly all the principal learned bodies in Europe, and in 1845 was made a corresponding member of the institute of France. In 1850 Mr. Prescott made a short visit to Europe, passing a few months in England, Scotland and Belgium. After his return he applied himself to the composition of a history of the reign of Philip II., which he had long meditated, and for which he had made an extensive collection of books and manuscripts. The first two volumes of this work appeared at Boston in 1855, and the third in 1858. The entire history was intended to comprise six volumes, but was never finished. On February 4, 1858, Mr. Prescott experienced a slight shock of paralysis, from the effects of which he soon recovered and resumed his literary pursuits. Eleven months afterwards, while at work with his Secretary in his study, he was struck speechless by a second attack of paralysis, and died about an hour afterward. Besides his histories, Mr. Prescott wrote brief memoirs of his friends John Pickering and Abbott Lawrence, and supplied to a Boston edition of Robertson's "History of Charles V.," a sequel relating the true circumstances of the emperor's retirement and death.

In person Mr. Prescott was tall and slender, with a fresh and florid complexion, and lively, graceful manners. "His personal appearance," says Mr. Bancroft, "was singularly pleasing, and won for him everywhere in advance a welcome and favor. His countenance had something that brought to mind the beautiful disdain, that hovers on that of Apollo. But while he was high-spirited, he was tender and gentle and humane. His voice was like music, and one could never hear enough of it. His cheerfulness reached and animated all about him. He could indulge in playfulness, and could also speak earnestly and profoundly; but he knew not how to be ungracious or pedantic." A similar account of his

personal character was given soon after his death by one of his secretaries in a communication to the New York Tribune: "Mr. Prescott's cheerfulness and amiability were truly admirable. He had a finely-wrought sensitive organization; he was high-spirited, courageous, resolute, independent; was free from cant or affectation of any sort. Yet no annoyances, great or small, the most painful illness or the most intolerable bore, could disturb his equanimity, or render him in the least degree sullen or discourteous. He was always gay, good humored, and manly; most gentle and affectionate to his family, most kind and gracious to all around him. He carried his kindness of disposition not only into his public but into his private writings. In the hundreds of letters, many of them of the most confidential character, treating freely of other authors and a great variety of persons, which I wrote at his dictation, not a single unkind or harsh or sneering expression occurs. He was totally free from the jealousy and envy so common among authors, and was always eager, in conversation as in print, to point out the merits of the great contemporary historians whom many men in his position would have looked upon as rivals to be dreaded, if not detested."

In his habits he was singularly methodical, and regulated his daily life by an exact division of time. He rose early, waked by an alarm clock, and clothed himself according to the weather as indicated by the thermometer, putting on so many pounds of clothing more or less, his garments being all marked with their weight in pounds and ounces. He walked five miles each day in the open air, or, if the weather was stormy, in the house, in the latter case putting on his hat, boots and gloves, and taking his cane as if out of doors. He always walked alone, if he could without discourtesy avoid having a companion, because while walking he occupied his thoughts in composition. His father had the same peculiarity, and both father and son for many years rode out at the same hour in the morning, mounting their horses at the same door, and riding off in opposite directions. To his literary labors he gave five hours daily, divided into three nearly equal portions of time, and for two hours a day listened to novel reading, which he thought stimulated his imagination and enhanced the animation of his style. His favorite novelists were Scott, Dickens, Dumas and Sue. His accounts of daily expenditures were kept with the greatest exactness, and one-tenth of his income was always devoted to charity. From the middle of November to the middle of June he resided in Boston, at No. 55 Beacon Street, where he had accumulated one of the finest private libraries in America, being especially rich in Italian and Spanish books. The summer was always passed at Nahant, where he had a cottage, and the autumn at Pepperell, in the farm house in which his ancestor, the commander at Bunker hill, was born and died. In the last years of his life he abandoned Nahant, and established his summer residence in the neighboring town of Swampscott. He carried his books with him to his seaside and rural residences, and wrote there with his usual diligence. His mode of composition was as follows: His secretary first read to him all the books that related to the general subject, Mr. Prescott dictating occasional memoranda as the reading went on. The plan of the work was then sketched a division into chapters made, and the authorities for the first chapter gathered together and read to him carefully, while he dictated copious notes of their contents and of the reflections or descriptions suggested by them. When the perusal of the authorities was finished, the mass of notes was read and re-read to Mr. Prescott until their substance was fully fixed in his mind. He then sat down to write, using for the purpose a writing instrument made for the blind, consisting of a frame of the size of a sheet of quarto letter paper, traversed by as many brass wires as there were to be lines on the page, and with a sheet of carbonated paper, such as is used for getting duplicates, pasted on the reverse side. With an ivory or agate stylus he traced his characters between the wires on the carbonated sheet, making indelible marks on the white page below. He wrote with great rapidity, in a hand so illegible that none could read it but himself and his secretary. The latter copied the manuscript as fast as written in a large and legible hand, on paper so ruled that there was twice the usual space between the lines, to afford room for interlineation. When the chapter was finished, it was read to him several times, carefully revised, and again copied before being sent to the printer. He took comparatively little pains with his style, but was unwearied in his efforts to ascertain the truth of history. "The excellence of his produc-

tions," says Mr. Bancroft, "is transparent to every reader. Compare what he has written with what others have left on the same subject, and Prescott's superiority beams upon you from the contrast. The easy flow of his language, and the faultless lucidity of his style, may make the reader forget the unremitting toil which the narrative has cost; but the critical inquirer sees everywhere the fruits of investigation rigidly and most perseveringly pursued, and an impartiality and soundness of judgment which give authority to every statement and weight to every conclusion." Edward Everett, in an address before the Massachusetts Historical Society, shortly after Mr. Prescott's death, said: "So long as in ages far distant, and not only in countries now refined and polished, but in those not yet brought into the domain of civilization, the remarkable epoch which he has described shall attract the attention of men; so long as the consolidation of the Spanish monarchy and the expulsion of the Moors, the mighty theme of the discovery of America, the wonderful genius of Columbus, the mail-clad forms of Cortes and Pizarro, and the other grim conquistadores, trampling new-found empires under the hoofs of their cavalry, shall be subjects of literary interest; so long as the blood shall curdle at the cruelties of Alva, and the fierce struggles of the Moslem in the East; so long will the writings of our friend be read. With respect to some of them, time, in all human probability, will add nothing to his materials. It was said the other day by our respected associate, President Sparks, (a competent authority,) that no historian, ancient or modern, exceeded Mr. Prescott in the depth and accuracy of his researches. He has driven his Artesian criticism through wretched modern compilations, and the trashy exaggerations of intervening commentators, down to the original contemporary witnesses; and the sparkling waters of truth have gushed up from the living rock. In the details of his narrative further light may be obtained from sources not yet accessible. The first letter of Cortes may be brought to light; the hieroglyphics of Palenque may be deciphered, but the history of the Spanish empire during the period for which he has treated it, will be read by posterity for general information, not in the ancient Spanish authors, not in black letter chronicles, but in the volumes of Prescott."

An old gentleman went out shooting partridges accompanied by his son. The gun was charged half way up the muzzle, and when at last the old gentleman started some birds he took a rest and blazed away, expecting to see some fall of course, but not so did it happen, for the gun recoiled with such force as to kick him over. The old man got up, and while rubbing the sparks out of his eyes, inquired of his son: "Dick, did I point the right end of the gun to the birds?"

A FRENCHMAN once saw a gentleman walk up to an open snuff-box in the hands of another, and take a pinch of snuff, having prefaced the act with the words "May I take the liberty?" On the next day the Frenchman went into a tobacco shop and asked for half a pound of that liberty.

A son of the Emerald Isle, telling his adventures in America, said: "The first feathered bird I ever saw in America was a porcupine. I treed him under a haystack, and shot him with a barn shovel; the first I shot him I missed him, and the second time I shot him I hit him where I missed him before."

Dr. Schmidt sued Dr. Adam, at Chicago, for damages for a cowering, and the jury decided that Adam should swallow three boxes of pills prepared by Schmidt. The court sickened, but told the jury that this would do for a joke but not a verdict, and sent them out again.

At Cologne, the other day, a young lady of good family was sentenced to a month's imprisonment for robbing a live ostrich, an inmate of the Zoological Gardens there, of some of his finest plumes.

"I wonder this child don't go to sleep," said an anxious mother to a female acquaintance. "Well, I don't," said the woman, "its face is so dirty it can't shut its eyes."

The nearest a certain man in this city ever approached to luck was to find a counterfeit note on a broken bank. He thinks if any body else had found it it would have been a gold piece.